



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

WÖLLNER AND THE PRUSSIAN RELIGIOUS EDICT OF 1788, II.

IN the preceding pages of this study a sketch was given of the development of religious thought in Prussia during the reign of Frederick the Great, in whom the *Aufklärung* may be said to have ascended the throne. Like so many great movements of thought, the *Aufklärung* produced in the ranks of its adherents elements and personalities unable to fight the whole battle through on the lines laid down by the boldest of its leaders. Among its camp-followers who had sought shelter in the opposing ranks and who had gradually risen to the position of chief of staff was Johann Christof von Wöllner, a rationalist minister turned mystic, whose career and relations with the new sovereign, Frederick William II., had been followed to his appointment as Minister of Religion under his former pupil, now the successor of Frederick the Great. Wöllner's first and most important official act was the proclamation of the Edict of Religion. Its genesis has already been traced.

The edict bears the date of July 9, 1788.¹ In the introduction Frederick William II. explains his purpose:

Long before our accession to the throne we had observed and remarked how necessary it would one day be to endeavor after the example of our predecessors and particularly of our deceased grandfather to maintain and partly re-establish in the Prussian dominions the Christian faith of the Protestant Church, in its ancient and primitive purity, and to repress, as much as possible, infidelity and superstition, and by this means also the corruption of the fundamental truths of the Christian religion and the licentiousness of morals which is a consequence of it; and to give at the same time to our faithful subjects a convincing proof of what they have a right to expect from us as their sovereign in regard to their most important concern, that is to say, full liberty of conscience, their tranquillity and security in the persuasion which they have embraced, and in the faith of their fathers, as well as in respect to protecting them against all perturbators of their divine service and religious constitution; in consequence whereof, having now regulated the most urgent affairs of the state and made some necessary and beneficial new arrangements, we have not wished to defer a single moment the serious consideration of this other important duty, which our character of sovereign imposes on us, and to publish by the present edict, our immutable will on this subject.

¹ Text of the edict in *Publicationen aus den königlichen Preussischen Staatsarchiven*, LIII. 250-257; Mylius, *Nov. Corp. Const.*, VIII. 2175-2183; Rabe, *Sammlungen*, etc., vol. I., pt. VII., pp. 726-733.

This introduction has a double retrospect which is enlightening. It points in the very first phrases to the period before his accession, when, as prince, Frederick William was shaping his views on these matters under the tutelage of Wöllner, to whom he has now committed the formulation and execution of his religious policy. Secondly, it ignores completely and purposely the reign of the great Frederick which was the apotheosis of the *Aufklärung*, and seeks to formulate its programme of reaction under cover of a return to the policy of sixty years before during the reign of the unrestrained autocracy of Frederick William I. (1713-1740). Every word of implied or expressed praise for his grandfather in suppressing superstition and falsification of fundamental beliefs is a condemnation of Frederick the Great's forty-six years of enlightened indifference. It then attempts to guarantee what is impossible in a bureaucratic state—that the private beliefs of all subjects shall be respected and their freedom of conscience assured while at the same time no official, in this case no minister of religion, though, of course, a subject with the rights above guaranteed, is to be allowed to disturb the settled creeds and faiths. Such a conception of a free church in a free state meant either hypocrisy on the part of the subject who is a state official, that is, a minister of religion, or oppression of the most galling kind on the part of the monarch who directs religious matters as though they were purely affairs of state. And then, in the interests of morality and religion, the paramour of Mme. Rietz and his minister, Brother Chrysophiron of the Rosicrucian Order, announce the immutable intention of a sovereign whose character was but the débris of broken resolutions and whose eleven years' reign is a chaos of half-executed policies.

The first six paragraphs of the edict, each brief, define the acknowledged position of the three confessions: Lutheran, Calvinist (Reformed), and Catholic, and the three tolerated sects, Herrnhuter, Mennonites, and Bohemian Brethren.² The officials are to prevent the rise of other harmful groups seeking to proselyte and thus abuse the toleration "so distinctive of the Prussian States". Proselyting is above all things forbidden to any confession or sect, though the individual is at perfect liberty to change his faith on his own initiative, but he must give proper and public notice of it to the state's officials. The activity of the Jesuits was in particular commended to the watchfulness of the state officials, religious and secular. Such modifications of the creeds as had been made

² There is here an historical error in referring to the latter three as tolerated sects. It was corrected by a special rescript, April 10, 1789. Cf. *Acten, Urkunden . . . zur . . . Kirchengeschichte* (Weimar, 1789), II. 173-175.

necessary by the antiquated language of the present form were permissible. Harmony between the sects was to be encouraged as far as possible. All this with the announced intention not only to maintain the old Prussian toleration but to see to it "that not the slightest intolerance should be exercised on anybody at any time . . . as long as each . . . keeps his own views to himself and carefully abstains from spreading them or seeking to convince others or mislead them or make them waver in their beliefs". "According to our opinion", says Frederick William II. (Wöllner), "every Christian ruler has only to see to it that the people are correctly and faithfully instructed in the true Christianity by the teachers and preachers, and thus to give every one the opportunity to learn and embrace it."

Sections VII. and VIII., which define and denounce the errors to be combated and which lay down the lines of warfare against them, are the heart of the edict. In section VII. the king describes how before his accession he had observed with regret the condition of the Protestant churches. The pulpits were filled with men who did not hesitate to preach doctrines "entirely contrary to the spirit of true Christianity . . . miserable errors long since refuted of Socinians, Deists, Naturalists, and other sects", thus diminishing the authority of the Bible "or even rejecting it entirely" together with "the belief in the mysteries of the redemption and atonement of the Saviour". To this "disorder" he proposes to put an end by fulfilling "one of the first duties of a Christian prince in insisting that Christianity in all its ancient and primitive dignity, splendor, and purity as taught in the Bible . . . and determined in the creeds of the chief confessions" shall no longer "be the sport of the delusions of new-fangled teachers".

He then proceeds in section VIII., as sole legislator, to command that all teachers and preachers abstain from spreading the errors denounced on pain of certain dismissal, or even severer punishment. Just as the king would preserve the civil law in all its authority, he now proposes to support the three chief creeds (Catholic, Lutheran, and Calvinist), which, if any teacher or preacher has once accepted, he is not at liberty to change or modify at his own will "in the minutest point". "If he teach any other thing (than the creed he has accepted) he is already punishable by the civil laws and cannot with propriety hold his office any longer." If he has ceased to believe in the creed he once accepted he may resign. "However, from our great love of liberty of conscience, we are willing that the clergy now in office who may be known to be unfortunately more or less infected by the errors set forth in section VII. should

remain quietly in their charges, only in the instructions they give their flock the rule of doctrine must always be kept sacred and inviolable."³

As has already been emphasized, the announcement of some sort of a religious programme of reaction was not unexpected in Prussia. In several of the German states⁴ the rulers had already issued more or less formal warnings to their ecclesiastical authorities to guard against the spread of heterodoxy by the teachings of the men whose pulpits were meant to be the bulwarks of the old faith. The freedom and toleration of Frederick II. and Joseph II. had found critics open and covert before their death. The principle of "*cujus regio, ejus religio*" was not dead in non-Prussian Germany, and even in Prussia the prince was still conceded a special claim to the direction of church affairs. Why, then, does the Religious Edict constitute such a striking incident in Prussian history? Why is the struggle against it one of the most inspiring battles in all the too brief annals of Prussian constitutional history—one which may lead a later age, as it did Bentham, to compare Schulz and Sack and Spalding and Teller to Pym and Hampden?

Two points, the simplest and most evident that can be suggested about the edict, are the answer to the question that has just been propounded. The ordinance was an *edict* and it appeared in *Prussia*. By its very name it was distinguished from the simple directions to the ecclesiastical department given at this time in so many other German states for the purpose of bettering religious conditions. The edict, in its title as well as in its contents, seemed an attempt to revive not only religious but political conditions of the sixteenth century, when the princes had supplanted the pope in the management of the Church and the guardianship of morals.

³ *Publicationen aus den K. Preuss. Staatsarchiven*, LIII. 253-255. For a better translation than the one in Segur, I. 442-447, and for several references I am indebted to an essay prepared in my seminar at Yale by Dr. D. W. Brandelle of Bates College.

⁴ Cf. Frank, *Gesch. d. protestantischen Theologie*, Theil III., pp. 172-174; Henke, *Allg. D. Bibliothek*, CXIV. 10-11; *Acten, Urkunden . . . zur . . . Kirchengeschichte*, I. 182-184 (for Baden's decree); *Acta Historico-Ecclesiastica Nostri Temporis*, III. 994-996 (for Saxony's edict of October 2, 1776). On the prosecution in Saxony of some of Kant's disciples, cf. Henke, *Archiv für Kirchengeschichte*, III. 715 ff. For Saxe-Weimar, cf. [Röhr] *Wie Carl August sich bei Verketzerungsversuchen gegen akademische Lehrer benahm* (Leipzig, 1830). The decrees of Württemberg are found in Th. Eisenlohr, *Sammlung d. württemberg. Kirchengesetze* (Tübingen, 1834-1835). For Joseph's liberal decrees, cf. *Acta Hist.-Eccl.*, vol. III., Theil 22, VII. 556 ff., XII. 621, and Nippold, *Kirchengeschichte*, I. 410-414. The decree in Mecklenburg was directed against the dogmatic errors of a brother of Hermes, Wöllner's lieutenant. Cf. Nippold, I. 427 (third edition).

Its appearance in Prussia, the home of religious toleration, is clearly a great factor in explaining the importance attached to it by contemporaries. Had it appeared in any minor German state it would have aroused repugnance and opposition, for it invaded academic and religious life and thought, the field where the German had maintained for himself the largest degree of freedom. Its proclamation in Prussia, the most powerful and prominent German state, and the one whose whole history and much of whose material prosperity since the days of John Sigismund was intimately related to the maintenance of complete religious toleration, made it doubly alarming to the German, who in matters of religion and philosophy had found in Prussia an opportunity to exercise undisturbed his *Schreibseligkeit*. Henceforth there were to be bounds and limits beyond which he might not go. If he were an ecclesiastic, he was further shamed and aroused by the offer that he might retain his position if he would stifle his conscience and accept creeds which he and his age doubted or rejected. In this last clause is the key to the situation. The age was the age of doubt and revolution in thought, while the language and the spirit of the edict were of the essence of reaction.

No sooner had the edict appeared than the pamphleteers of all kinds gave it their immediate, undivided, and unscrupulous attention. Many of these pamphlets have fortunately perished without leaving a trace of their existence. Many more would be unknown to us if it were not for the attention given them by Nicolai's *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek*—a periodical of heavy respectability, which was the chief organ of the *Aufklärung* in Berlin if not in all Germany. Its reviewer, Henke, has left us a monument of his zeal and activity in his reviews of ninety-four pamphlets on the edict and the issues involved. These pamphlets were many of them so violent that their titles alone are given, their contents being left to sink into deserved obscurity. Some of them rise to the proportion of stout volumes. Henke mentions as among the most popular one of three hundred and seventy-one pages. Some of them went through two or three editions in a few days. Henke's reviews occupy about six hundred octavo pages in two volumes of the *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek*.⁵ So clear and fair in general are most of these reviews, though written from the standpoint of the *Aufklärung* for its chief organ, that one cannot help feeling that they represent the voice of the age in condemnation of the edict. Henke's own summary on the general attitude is

One may assert with certainty that in the Prussian states the largest

⁵ Vols. CXIV. and CXV. (Kiel, 1793).

and the best part, not only of the ecclesiastics but also of the learned classes in general and of all classes of men who think for themselves, have withheld their approval of most of the measures that have followed the edict. They are either disturbed or displeased by them, even though in matters of religion they are not wholly opposed to the principles and views which these measures are meant to support.⁶

The edict was not without its defenders among the pamphleteers, and though some of them by their tone merit the appellations bestowed upon them by Henke of "hired sycophants and miserable flatterers", there still remains a group representing the orthodox who felt that the situation justified such a measure as the edict. These defenders were not confined to Prussia. From ducal Saxony came words of warm approval. "Hail to the great and wise Prussian monarch", exclaims the editor of the leading religious journal of North Germany, "who in this edict, framed with as much love and moderation as wisdom and earnestness, puts a check to the terrible confusion which certain popular deistic and Socinian teachers, so well characterized in paragraph VII., have brought about under the misused name of *Aufklärung*."⁷

However, the scattered voices of the defenders of the new order were not able to quiet the alarm of those who felt themselves endangered by the new minister and his edict. Men who for decades had occupied great pulpits and had been a power in the land saw themselves exposed to petty persecution and unmerited disgrace. Some resigned at once in order to avoid such a period being put to their activities as teachers or preachers. Some boldly persisted and defended their views in protests and pamphlets.⁸

On a higher plane than the pamphlet war, which is chiefly important as an amazing revelation of the boldness and unscrupulousness of the press in Prussia on the eve of the Revolution, is the opposition made to the Wöllner measures by the Superior Consistory for the Lutheran and Catholic churches. In the framing of the new measure they had had no hand; but they did not propose to let the occasion pass without a conscientious effort to modify it, and to save what they thought was more important than creeds or doctrines—liberty of thought and scholarly investigation into truth and the distinctly Protestant right of each to accept the Scriptures as the standard of his faith and to interpret them as he understood them.

⁶ *Allg. D. Bibliothek*, CXIV. 77; Spalding, *Lebensbeschreibung*, p. 118, says, "Das Aufsehen bei dieser geschwinden und starken Machtausserung des neuen Ministers war gross, aber der Eindruck davon bey dem beträchtlichen Theile des hiesigen Publicums nicht zum Vortheil der Unternehmung."

⁷ *Acten, Urkunden . . . zur . . . Kirchengeschichte*, I. 461.

⁸ *Zeit. für Preuss. Gesch. und Landeskunde*, II. 772.

It would be a pleasure, did space permit, to review the services and worth of this group of men: Spalding, Sack, Büsching, Teller, and Diterich,⁹ names which represented in the Prussia of that day the most progressive and liberal theological thought. With the exception of Büsching, the geographer and director of the Berlin-Köln Gymnasium, they were pastors of leading churches in Berlin, and all, with the possible exception of Diterich, had made a name for themselves as theological and philosophical thinkers. They were in a sense part of the Prussian bureaucracy, and Spalding, the senior member, had already passed the allotted three score and ten and felt the burden of his advancing years. But with one accord they agreed that they were called to take up the struggle for things more worth while than office. Spalding resigned his preaching position at the St. Nicolai and Marien churches in Berlin that he might not at his age be involved in petty persecutions resulting from the edict, but he retained his membership in the Consistory with the definite feeling that here, despite ill-health and his seventy-five years, he was called to perform a duty which he could not and must not shirk.¹⁰ Teller with equal frankness stated in a letter¹¹ to Wöllner that though he did not feel that he came under the category of the ministers denounced in paragraph VII. of the edict he must in justice to his conscience ask to be relieved of his duties as a preacher¹² because he "has for years in his capacity as a teacher in the church and university spoken boldly and without reserve against all mere creeds made by men who like himself were likely to err". His office and his membership in the Consistory and in the Academy of Sciences he desired to retain but, if needs be, he would give them up too. Wöllner whose intentions looked to the ultimate dismissal of these men thought that it would be better "to tolerate them for a short time".¹³

The members of the Consistory held long conferences as to what they should do.¹⁴ Sack, the Calvinist member, had already sent his superior, Dörnberg, a ringing indictment of the edict, boldly stating that for twenty years he had not taught in conformity with the letter of the creed, from which he had dissented when in 1769 he

⁹ Cf. *Zeitschrift für historische Theologie* (1859), XXIX.; Meusel, *Lexikon der verstorbenen Deutschen Schriftsteller* (Leipzig, 1815), XIV. For a character-sketch of Büsching, cf. *Archiv für die neueste Kirchengeschichte*, vol. I., heft 1., pp. 151 ff. For Diterich, *ibid.*, V. 216 ff.

¹⁰ Spalding, *Lebensbeschreibung*, pp. 113-114.

¹¹ *Zeit. für hist. Theologie*, XXIX. 44-48, under date July 21, 1788.

¹² He was at this time dean (*Propst*) of the Petrikirche in Köln (Berlin).

¹³ Preuss in *Zeit. für Preuss. Gesch. und Landeskunde*, II. 770-772.

¹⁴ Spalding, *sup. cit.*, p. 118.

became a preacher.¹⁵ Teller and Spalding, as has been said, resigned their preaching duties but held to their membership in the Consistory that they might do their part in the fight. It was agreed that they should ask the king for permission to present to him their objections to the edict.¹⁶ Despite Wöllner's opposition the king gave a grudging consent. Sack, the Calvinist member, was selected to draft the protest. It was presented on September 10, 1788.

It is not possible here to give a complete survey of these two able documents from the pen of Sack. Very simply and sincerely they point out the danger hidden in the edict, especially in paragraph VIII., which fixed the old creeds as the norms of faith. Evils are admitted. For these Sack had already suggested remedies in his *pro memoria*. But these evils are as nothing to the anticipated loss of evangelical freedom of teaching and preaching, the invasion of the freedom of conscience of whole communities, the stimulus to dissension and sectarian spirit, and the death of progressive scholarship in the field of Scriptural study. Good men and true must become hypocrites or be treated with unbecoming harshness. Error will go uncorrected and hypocrisy flourish.

It was useless. The king gave their reply no adequate consideration. He referred it to the three ministers, Wöllner, Carmer, and Dörnberg, with instructions to send the Consistory about their business. "There must not be the variation of a hair's breadth from the edict." The *Aufklärer* must be crushed. To accomplish it he was already considering further measures for the stricter censorship of the press. Wöllner was curtly told "to keep his priests in better subordination than his predecessor had done and to be governed solely by the edict, as I must hold you alone responsible".¹⁷

In the correspondence that ensued the clear unequivocal note is sounded by the Consistory. The three advisers of the king present a wavering and uncertain front. Wöllner was angry at the opposition to his pet edict and highly indignant when the Consistory presumed to criticize his German. Carmer, the chancellor, timidly approves the royal policy and seeks to explain away objections. Let us be lenient with him, for his life's work, the new Prussian Code, after many vicissitudes was approaching completion, and he did not feel free to jeopardize it by living up to the best of his thought on the subject of the edict.¹⁸ Dörnberg alone is firmly against a reproof to the Consistory and is unwilling to give instruc-

¹⁵ *Zeit. für hist. Theologie*, XXIX, 9-17.

¹⁶ The material for the following paragraph will be found in the documents published by Sack's son in the *Zeit. für hist. Theologie*, XXIX.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, XXIX, 22-23.

¹⁸ Stölzel, *Svarez*.

tions in theology to theologians with an international reputation.¹⁹ But the reproof was framed nevertheless. The Consistory was told in direct phrases that if they had done their duty there would be no such religious condition to deal with. The Consistory had lost their fight for true Lutheranism. The creeds of preceding centuries stood now by law on a plane with the Scriptures, or rather they replaced it, for it was the Bible as presented in the creeds that was henceforth to be taught. Theirs was however the satisfaction of having done the right as they saw it. "We have done what we thought advisable and our duty. Now we can and must remain silent."²⁰

One thing they did accomplish behind Wöllner's back. Through their representations to Chancellor Carmer the king was led to publish on December 19, 1788, a sort of supplementary statement, explaining that the edict was only a church police law, in which the king had no intention of placing the church creeds on the same plane of authority with the Scriptures. It was a hollow victory, for the king when prosecutions arose under the edict insisted that it was a binding law of the state. Indeed, Frederick William II. in the next four years, in his efforts to make clear his intentions in issuing the edict and in defending himself from the, to him, unexpected implications of his decree, seemed to be helplessly struggling in the grasp of a legal Frankenstein of his own creation.

Not so his minister. Wöllner, with all the force that comes from narrowness, with all the narrowness and lack of discrimination of the petty theologian at war with the *Zeitgeist*, with all the certainty that comes from adhesion to theories based on partial views and formulated apart from the responsibilities of administration, with all the recklessness engendered by great and sudden power and the shelter of a royal name for the policies he conceived, moved on to more petty and more galling measures against the *Aufklärung* and its representatives.²¹ Now that he had embarked his pupil and brother Rosicrucian on the course indicated by the edict, it was

¹⁹ Dörnberg to Carmer, November 20, 1788, in *Zeit. für hist. Theologie*, XXIX.; Carmer replies begging him to give his signature as it is collegiate action in which even those who dissent are expected to sign. "Ueberdem fürchte ich, und kann das fast mit Gewissheit voraussehen, dass eine fernere Verweigerung dieser Unterschrift von Sr. Königl. Majestät ungnädig aufgenommen werden und Ew. Excellenz Unannehmlichkeiten zuziehen dürfte."

²⁰ *Ibid.*, XXIX. 43.

²¹ "Sollte sie", says Henke in summarizing an "Umständliche Anweisung" of the Immediate Commission in 1794, "von der Nachwelt für das Photometer der Brandenburgischen Geistlichkeit unsers Zeithalters gehalten werden, so würde die Nachwelt unfehlbar sehr kleine Begriffe von dieser Geistlichkeit hegen müssen." *Archiv für Kirchengeschichte* (1794), vol. I., heft III., pp. 1-28.

easy to keep him there and lead him further.²² Criticism and opposition now became defiance of royal authority, and whenever obedience to his authority was in any way involved the king is violent in his language toward the offenders and even toward Wöllner, when he suspected him of laxness in the execution of his decrees.²³ Liberty of the press became, if it aired its views of the edict, impudence of the press and the royal reply was a renewed and stricter censorship of the press, proclaimed on the same day as the king's attempt to explain the Religious Edict as an ecclesiastical disciplinary ordinance.

The Religious Edict, if it had stood alone, would have been enough to justify the deep disgust felt by contemporaries with the Wöllner régime. But that feeling found a further basis and was given wider extent by the supplementary edicts in which it was developed and applied.²⁴ Of these the edict for the censorship

²² Wöllner did not dominate the Staatsrath nor the foreign policy of Prussia. Cf. p. 520, below, and *Hist. Zeit.*, LXII. 285-286. Note the adverse vote of Prussia on the proposition to include in the *Wahlcapitulation* of Leopold II. in 1792 a prohibition on all publications against the Protestant creeds. Cf. Henke, pp. 355-392.

²³ *Allg. D. Biographie*, XLIV. 156-157.

²⁴ Most of these supplementary edicts will be found in Mylius, *Nov. Corp. Const.* (1791-1795), tomus IX. In tomus VIII., under the dates February 5 and March 31, 1790, are the edicts directing that all preachers of the Reformed Church should use the Heidelberg catechism and Hering's *Unterricht in der Christlichen Lehre* to the exclusion of all other compendiums; and a direction to all inspectors of this church as to how candidates for the ministry are to be examined. In tomus IX. the following may be cited as the most important and typical edicts or rescripts: December 15, 1791, a direction to the church inspectors to supervise the life and conduct of all preachers, teachers, and sextons, and to see to it that the preachers send in copies of sermons that they preach on the text to be set for them by the inspectors; March 13, 1792, directions to the Consistory on the method of examining candidates for the pulpit after they have been certified by the Immediate Commission established in the preceding November; July 12, 1792, edict requiring the use of the manual *Die Christliche Lehre in Zusammenhang*. This was a Lutheran catechism put forth nominally by Hermes but the real author of it was Diterich, a member of the Consistory, who now repudiated it as a youthful production he had long considered inadequate. On the struggle over the introduction of this catechism between its author and his colleagues, on the one hand, and Wöllner, on the other, cf. Spalding, *Lebensbeschreibung*, pp. 121-124, Preuss in *Zeit. für Preuss. Gesch.*, II. 770 ff., Sack in *Zeit. für hist. Theologie*, LII. 423 ff. The idea of such a catechism had been taken up by the king in 1789 and the manuscript submitted to the theological faculty at Halle whose reply was "dass das vorgelegte Ms. keine einzige der Eigenschaften an sich habe, die ein allgemeiner Landescatechismus fordere." Cf. *Acten, Urkunden . . . Kirchengeschichte* (1788), pp. 421-452. This matter of reforming catechisms, song-books, etc., was not peculiar to Prussia as may be seen by examining the files of the *Acten, Urkunden . . . Kirchengeschichte* for the years 1788 to 1792. Further edicts are those of March 21, 1793, May 13, 1793, and June 20 and July 4 of the same year, and in 1794 under date of April 14 a very important "Rescript vom Verfahren gegen die neologischen Prediger und Uebertreter der Religions-Edicts", also February 20, May 1, and November 6.

of the press has seemed on the whole the most important and is reserved for an extended treatment later. It is sufficient here to remind ourselves that though censorship of the press was not new to a Prussia just out from under the absolutism of Frederick the Great, the censorship of Frederick,²⁵ with its chief interest in directing discussion away from political topics, was in spirit and intent not the censorship of Wöllner, which through the activity of such creatures as Hermes and Hillmer²⁶ was interfering with the printing of books and pamphlets in theology and philosophy—fields of thought dear to the German thinkers and writers—two groups not entirely identical as one may convince themselves by dipping into the pamphlet literature of that day.

As a result of the renewed censorship of the press the German public saw the great organ of the *Aufklärung*, Nicolai's *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek*, forced to move to Hamburg by the activity of Wöllner, hitherto one of its chief contributors. The local publishers and authors were annoyed and exasperated by the method and spirit in which manuscripts were examined, blue-pencilled, and even rewritten by the censors. The book-dealers who would import from the great markets like Leipzig found their shipments examined for contraband works. Teachers, preachers, and university faculties were spied upon, and silenced far less by successful prosecution than by the spectre of government interference. Of the former there was as far as I know but one, but the pressure was felt by the nobler minds like Kant and Fichte. The former saw his books forbidden and his university lectures disapproved. High-spirited but even-minded, he turned to other fields of thought and awaited the death of Frederick William II. to resume his lectures and literary activity in the field of religion and morals.

Besides the renewal of the censorship of the press—in itself more exasperating than efficacious—the Wöllner régime of reaction sought to make itself effective by a long series of supplementary

In 1795 there are two edicts having to do with the use of the new catechism and the subject of theological education, under date of June 14 and August 13. Special directions to the clergy in 1795 and 1796 emphasizing the importance of teaching the nature and sacredness of an oath are to be found in Henke, *Archiv*, etc., IV. 765, and V. 166. For material on the censorship of the press under the Wöllner régime it is sufficient here to refer to the documents in *Archiv für Gesch. d. Buchhandels*, IV. and V., and Consentius's articles in the *Preussische Jahrbücher*, CXVII.

²⁵ Cf. Preuss, *Friedrich d. Grosse*, I. 138, III. 249 ff.; Pigge, *Religiöse Toleranz Fr. d. Grossen*, pp. 68–75.

²⁶ On Hermes and Hillmer, cf., besides the general accounts of the reign, Grünhagen, *Zeit. für Gesch. u. Altertum Schlesiens*, XXVII. 22–23, and *Publicationen aus den K. Preuss. Staatsarchiven*, "Preussen und die Katholische Kirche", VI. 160–161. They had formerly been Herrnhuter. Cf. Nippold, I. 431, 434.

edicts dealing with the reform of the catechism and religious instruction in the schools,²⁷ by the institution of a special (Immediate) Commission not controlled by the Consistory, which should examine candidates for the pulpit,²⁸ and by the promulgation of the so-called *schema examinis candidatorum*, outlining the sort of tests which prospective candidates for the pulpit must undergo and inferentially compelling university readjustments if its requirements were to be met.

The theological faculty of Halle, which lived and worked in the traditions of such men as Thomasius, Wolff, Semler, and the radical Bahrddt, were soon in conflict with the Religious Department on account of their inclinations toward liberal views. Men like Nösselt and Niemeyer refused to change their methods of teaching at the direction of such theologians as Wöllner, Hermes, and Hillmer. When in the summer of 1794 the latter two dropped into Halle on an investigating tour a certain marked uneasiness on the part of the student body led them to leave town in haste and send back their directions from a safe distance. The faculty maintained a dignified disregard of the avalanche of rescripts from the Religious Department and, on an appeal to the king, were upheld by the Staatsrath, Wöllner dissenting, and told to make their own teaching rules and disregard those of Wöllner's commissioners.²⁹ With the exception of Silesia, where there is no trace of its enforcement and where none of the supplementary edicts, not even that on the censorship of the press, was published,³⁰ Brandenburg-Prussia, especially in the cities and university centres, felt some of the effects if not the full force of the Wöllner régime. East Prussia, according to Philippson, was almost as unaffected by the edict as was Silesia. Though there is no basis on which one may estimate, as does Philippson, that three-fourths of the clergy paid no attention to the edicts and efforts of Wöllner, one must admit that the evidence he presents of the indifference, sullen acquiescence or open defiance on

²⁷ Cf. n. 24. p. 518, above, and Heigel, *Deutsche Geschichte*, I. 77; Henke, *Archiv*, etc., I. 391-429.

²⁸ Composed of such men as Hermes, Hillmer, and Woltersdorf. Silberschlag, who was a member for a short time, though a frequent defender of Wöllner in the Consistory, was a man of a far higher type than the three first named. On this commission, cf. *Zeit. für hist. Theologie* (1862), pp. 430-437; Philippson, *Gesch. d. Preuss. Staatwesens*, I. 343; Geiger, *Berlin, 1688-1840*, II. 11; and *Zeit. für Gesch. u. Altertum Schlesiens*, XXVII. 21.

²⁹ Preuss in *Zeit. für Preuss. Gesch.*, II. 768-769. One of the rescripts telling the Halle faculty how and what to teach will be found in Henke, *Archiv*, etc., IV. 1-5. The editor adds that he refrains from commenting on it as he has not those hundred ducats handy with which to pay fines.

³⁰ Cf. article by C. Grünhagen in *Zeit. für Gesch. u. Altertum Schlesiens*, XXVII. 23-24; also Berlin Archives, Rep. 9, F. 2, a.

the part of the great mass of the clergy strongly supports the opinion already expressed, that the effect of the efforts of the minister and his supporters is more clearly shown in the disgust and opposition that they aroused than in any change in the conditions at which they were directed.³¹ The sturdy independence of the judges and the administrative officials and the willingness of capable lawyers to undertake the defense of offenders still further tied the hands of Wöllner. Publishers and pamphleteers continued to bid defiance in a most scurrilous manner to all the efforts of the censors, Hermes and Hillmer.³² The words of the latter in 1791 are most significant in this regard. "We are considered all powerful but we have not been able to oust a single neological preacher."³³

It would unduly prolong this chapter if space were taken to excerpt and analyze the supplementary edicts but it must be clear to the reader as it is to the investigator that they furnish important material for the correct understanding of the policy of the author of the Religious Edict. That edict must be interpreted in the light of the succeeding measures which sought to apply it in detail. Its author might, if judged by that edict alone, claim indulgence on the basis of the liberal sentiments expressed in its opening paragraphs and the ambiguities of its phraseology at other points. But when he follows it up by a group of enforcing measures which seek by petty regulation to limit or direct thought and teaching in schools of all grades and in the pulpits of the two great branches of the Reformed Church in Brandenburg-Prussia, he betrays himself utterly. It is *ex pede Wöllnerum* everywhere. The man and his measures cannot be separated for the measures are mounted in a setting of official correspondence—fawning and hypocritical when directed to his royal master,³⁴ truculent and abusively denunciatory when prepared in reply to the clear and thoughtful protests of the Consistory and the university faculties who cared less for their place and their office than they did for clear consciences and freedom of thought.

Behind Wöllner stood Frederick William II. With a certain doggedness that was characteristic and worthy of a better cause, the king clung to his minister and his minister's policy. They become by that very fact more distinctly than by his putting his signature

³¹ Cf. Philippson, vol. II., ch. II.

³² L. Geiger, *Vorträge und Versuche* (Berlin, 1890), ch. XIII.

³³ Nösselt, *Leben*, p. 61. Quoted in *Zeit. für Gesch. u. Altertum Schlesiens*, XXVII. 23.

³⁴ For examples of the fulsome flattery Wöllner lavished on the king, cf. Stölzel, *Svarez*, page 256, note 2. His language to the Consistory is to be found in the Sack papers in *Zeit. für hist. Theologie*, *sup. cit.*

to them his measures. The ideas, originally Wöllner's, had become the king's by their early relations as teacher and pupil, by their associations in the Rosicrucian Order, and by their joint interests now, as minister and sovereign, in combating the tide of irreligious and revolutionary thought.³⁵

The tenacity with which the religious policy was adhered to by the king stands out even more emphatically when it is recalled that its development and execution were parallel with the consideration of questions of foreign policy affecting the whole future of the Prussian states—the Dutch war, the abandonment of the Fürstenbund, the Hertzberg alliances and exchange schemes, the complications with Austria leading in July, 1790, to the treaty of Reichenbach and through that ultimately, in 1791 and 1792, to a closer alliance with Austria in view of the Polish and French situation. It is, indeed, the upheaval in the latter country that strengthened the king in his policy of internal reaction. The experience of Louis XVI. with the obstreperous parliaments was in the king's mind in dealing with the protests of the Superior Consistory. He did not intend, he said, that they should play the rôle of a parliament in the Prussian state.³⁶ Recalcitrant subjects violating the Edict of Religion and that on the censorship of the press appeared in a different light when France seemed to be reaping the results of eighteenth-century irreligion and irreverence for old beliefs and old dogmas—political and religious.

The danger in Prussia of any such movement as that in France is not conceivable. The prosecutors of the king, however, did not fail to cite dangerous political utterances in the case of at least one violator of the Religious Edict.³⁷ The Consistory indignantly denied any intention of playing the rôle of a French parliament. The opposition, then, to the Wöllner régime did not take the form of political agitation except in the sense that what are political and social rights in the vocabulary of one people may be represented in the language of another people by freedom of religious thought and teaching; and the agitation in their defense is the equivalent of political activity in another land. Far more significant from the standpoint of Prussian history was the quiet but persistent check on the king and minister to be found in the stubborn unwillingness of the

³⁵ The bold but considerate judgment of Teller on Frederick William II. is interesting in this connection. Cf. *Predigt zum Gedächtniss Friederich Wilhelm II.* (Berlin, 1797), pp. 8-9.

³⁶ Letter of the king to Carmer, June 11, 1792, in *Zeit. für Preuss. Gesch.*, III, 70-71.

³⁷ In the trial of Schulz, 1791-1792. Cf. Amelang, *Vertheidigung*, pp. 92 ff., and Volkmar, *Religionsprozess*, etc., p. 20.

courts and bureaucracy, including in these the clergy itself, to fall into line with the new policy.³⁸

Opposition and agitation seemed to savor of revolution and against such manifestations in his own lands he was determined to act with severity.³⁹ It is when in the spring of 1794 the whole Wöllnerian régime of edicts, inspections, and commissions seemed breaking down that this characteristic of the king makes him the real leader. The sovereign in him could not brook the inefficiency in execution that Wöllner and his subordinates exhibited. The unchecked tide of liberal thought in the press, pulpit, and universities, the independence of the courts and the tactics of the Consistory in the trial of the boldest of the violators of the Religious Edict and the confession about the same time by the Examination Commission that they could effect nothing, put the king, already harassed by the course of affairs in Poland and the dissensions with the English over the campaign against the French, into a fine fury of helpless wrath. New edicts were showered upon the bureaucracy, proving by their numbers the inefficiency of preceding efforts, not, as Nippold contends, their power and effectiveness. The instigator of the system was called sharply to account for his futility in making the king's will effective. Wöllner was deprived of the office of director of public buildings that he might "dedicate himself wholly to the cause of God" and a little later (March, 1794) in an autograph letter from the king outlining new forms of activity, including the calling of Kant to account, he was curtly informed that "this disorder (*Unwesen*) must be absolutely checked; until then we shall not again be friends."⁴⁰ Wöllner's activity as the result of this secured neither success for the decrees nor a complete restoration to the king's favor.

The untimely and unnational character of the whole reactionary effort is shown not only by the failures recorded above but by the

³⁸ When this independence of the officials in the matter of the religious policy of the king is considered in conjunction with the open criticism of his war policy in 1794 by a clique in the army, it throws an interesting light on the weakness of the king's control over the two chief supports of the Prussian monarchy. Cf. Ford, *Hanover and Prussia* (New York, 1903), pp. 61, 68, and 72, and Cavaignac, *La Formation de la Prusse Contemporaine*, I. 211.

³⁹ Berlin Archives, Rep. 9, F. 2, a, contains interesting edicts of February 1 and June 30, 1792, directed against revolutionary agitation. For further evidence of the king's distrust of the masses, cf. Lehmann, *Stein*, I. 161.

⁴⁰ Bailleu in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, XLIV. 156-157. Wöllner had further compromised his standing with the king by his opposition to the whole policy of the French war. Cf. a memoir of his on the foreign policy of Prussia in October, 1794, referring to his attitude and the king's displeasure in *Hist. Zeit.*, LXII. 285-286.

immediate fall of Wöllner and his henchmen on the accession of a new sovereign.⁴¹

Frederick William II. died on November 16, 1797, and his high-minded and clean-hearted son and successor, Frederick William III., after having purged the Augean stables of the Prussian court addressed himself almost immediately to checking any further activity on the part of Wöllner, Hermes, and Hillmer. Wöllner, who had the effrontery to assume that the new sovereign would allow him to twist his utterances into an approval and renewal of the Religious Edict and its supplements,⁴² was overwhelmed by a crushing reproof. The king, after denying that any of his official utterances were meant to indicate an intention to enforce more strictly the edict, refers Wöllner to the example of one of his predecessors (Münchhausen), who had every reason to trust his own judgment and yet always consulted his qualified subordinates, of which Wöllner is reminded there is no lack in his department. The king then proceeds:

In his [Münchhausen's] day there was no Religious Edict but more religion and less hypocrisy than now, and the Religious Department stood higher in the eyes of Germans and foreigners. Personally, I reverence religion and carefully obey its blessed precepts and would not for worlds rule over a people who had no religion. But I know also that it is and must remain an affair of the heart, of the feelings, and of individual conviction and may not be debased into a senseless mummerly by methodical compulsion if it is to further virtue and righteousness. Reason and philosophy must be its inseparable companions, then it will stand by itself without the need of the authority of those who would presume to force their creeds upon future ages and prescribe to coming generations how they should always think. If in the management of your office you act according to genuine Lutheran principles which are so wholly in consonance with the spirit and teachings of their founder, if you see to it that the pulpits and teachers' desks are occupied by upright and capable men who have advanced with the knowledge of the day especially in exegesis without attaching themselves to dogmatic subtleties, you will soon see that neither mandatory laws nor admonitions are necessary in order to maintain true religion in the land and to extend its beneficent influence over the happiness and morality of all classes.⁴³

⁴¹ The brother of Frederick the Great, Prince Henry of Prussia, Wöllner's former employer, records his opinion of the régime in a letter to Count Henckel in 1791. "[Ich] sei Glücklich nichts von Berlin, Potsdam, Friedrich Wilhelm, König Bischoffswerder und König Wöllner zu hören." Cf. Graf Henckel, *Briefe der Brüder Friedrichs des Grossen* (Berlin, 1871). Quoted by Grünhagen in *Zeit. für Gesch. u. Altertum Schlesiens*, *sup. cit.*

⁴² Royal order of November 23, 1797, and Wöllner's interpretation of it, dated December 5. Letter of Göckingk to Benzler in *Zeit. für Preuss. Gesch.*, XIV. 67, and Volkmar, *infra*.

⁴³ L. Volkmar, *Religionsprozess des Predigers Schulz* (Leipzig, 1846), pp. 327-328. The author of this state paper was Bismarck's maternal grandfather, Mencken. Cf. Hüffer, *Anastasius Ludwig Mencken* (Bonn, 1890), p. 18. Hüffer

The new king had already (December 27, 1797) restored to the Consistory its control over the affairs in its charge before Wöllner's activity began. Piece by piece the whole elaborate structure of edicts, commissions, and catechisms fell to the ground. The discredited minister clung to his office for three months after the king's disapproval had been visited upon him. On March 11, 1798, he was dismissed without the pension he asked for and without hope of ever holding the least office under Frederick William III. A little more than two years later a grave on his estate at Gross Reitz closed over the fallen leader of one of the most extraordinary reactions in the political and religious history of Prussia.⁴⁴ None was left to bear his name or share the opprobrium heaped upon it by contemporaries and echoed anew by each historian of the reign of Frederick William II.

GUY STANTON FORD.

dates it January 12. Mencken and Svarez, the new king's tutor and one of the greatest legal minds in Prussian history, represented the best traditions of Prussian bureaucracy throughout the trying years of Frederick William II's reign. For Svarez, *cf.* Stölzel's biography, one of the most suggestive books in the whole range of German historical writing. Also Dernburg, *König Friedrich Wilhelm III. u. Svarez*, a rectoral address delivered at Berlin in 1885.

⁴⁴ Nippold (*Kirchengeschichte*, I, 432) contends that the Berlin bureaucracy has in ecclesiastical matters never escaped from the influence of the Wöllner régime.